

“He Lifts up the Humble” by Steve Sommerer
 Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost Sept. 1st, 2019
 Sermon Text: Luke 14:1-14
 Download PDF

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior
 Jesus Christ. Amen.

From Luke 14:1-14 When Jesus noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, He told them this parable: “When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited... But when you are invited take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, ‘Friend, move up to a better place.’ For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” Then Jesus said to His host, “When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid.” So far the text.

Our Collect Prayer carries the golden thread that binds together the parts of our service: “*Teach us by Your Holy Spirit to follow the example of Your Son in true humility... avoiding ungodly pride.*” We sang it this way in our sermon hymn: “*As You, Lord, have lived for others, So may we for others live. Freely have Your gifts been granted; Freely may Your servants give.*”

Today’s Scripture is about more than seating arrangements for formal occasions. It’s really about the attitude of our heart. What does it mean to be humble – to put others before ourselves. Do we love our neighbor’s as ourselves? Do our words build up or do we gossip and tear other’s down? Our Hebrews’ text calls for hospitality, which is to say heartfelt concern for those around us, especially the stranger or those in need. How easily we lose sight of the stranger we might invite to church or speak to in the grocery line... or even the spouse we could help with chores. Our verses teach us about living outside our own self-interest. Hebrews said, “*Doing good and sharing what you have is a sacrifice pleasing to God.*”

More often we get such tunnel vision. We miss the people and needs and opportunities right in front of us. We have eyes, but we don’t see. But those are just symptoms. The cause is sinful pride. Pride makes us self-centered and ungrateful. It makes us discontented. Pride makes us dismissive of others. Pride stalks the hallways of our schools, in our

workplaces, and even in our churches. Pride leads to marital unhappiness and pits parents against children. And pride is deadly because the first commandment forbids making myself my god.

And so we pray the Holy Spirit teach us to follow Jesus in true humility. The Christian life isn't about pridefully putting others in their place, but about humility before God and our neighbors. To be humble we have to see with God's eyes and learn how things really are with us. God tells us the sad truth, *"In my flesh," Paul said, "there is no good thing."* "No good thing" doesn't leave much to be proud of! Ephesians 2 says: *"We were by nature objects of God's wrath."* Genesis says, *"Every inclination of man's heart is only evil, all the time."* The Psalmist wrote: *"There is no one who does good, not even one."* God's truth about us is humbling. And if God's Word humbles us, it's so that we can boast in the cross of Christ. Remember, Galatians 6, *"May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."*

The child of God isn't the proud, Pharisee pushing for the best seat at the table, making himself great at the expense of the spouse or child or fellow church member. The child of God is in the lowliest place, unable to lift his eyes to heaven. From this place, God can lift you up. From the lowest seat at the table, God invites sinful people forgiven in the blood of Jesus to move up to the place of honor. And that seat is freely set aside for you in Jesus' blood.

Genuine Christians will nod knowingly and join Paul when he says, *"By the grace of God, I am what I am."* We note in our verses Jesus is true God, yet didn't demand to sit at the head of the table. Jesus had righteous reason for pride, but instead suffered insult and injury. Philippians 2 says, Christ Jesus *"who being in very nature God did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross."*

God stepped forth from heaven and the King of Kings resided in a Virgin's womb, nestled in a manger and died on a cross. King Jesus humbled Himself to save prideful losers like you and I who couldn't do a thing to earn our way back to Him. Jesus had every reason for pride and yet submitted Himself entirely to the Father's will to pave your path back to Himself through Spirit-born faith.

In God's kingdom of grace, only the lowly will be exalted, only the last will be first... so let's not waste one moment of our lives exalting ourselves over each other... better to take the least position... knowing that

Jesus once sat in that place to give you God's gracious invitation to move up to His higher place; your heavenly home.

Even now God would tap us lowly children. We who are cast down to the depths are - in God's unimaginable love and mercy - invited to an exalted place of honor at His Table. Here at His Holy Communion we feast with our lips on His own flesh and blood... there to find through faith the full and free treasure of His salvation.

So here we are once again, prideful people, yet humbled by God's grace. Here receiving our Lord Jesus, He sends us out again with a word of kindness for the stranger, a word of comfort for the sufferer, a word and act of mercy for the person in need. He sends us to welcome those who may not be welcomed anywhere else in the world, but through Jesus' blood are welcomed into God's family.

Taught by the Holy Spirit and following the example of God's Son in true humility, God calls us to put into practice the words we sing. *"As You, Lord, have lived for others, So may we for others live. Freely have Your gifts been granted; Freely may Your servants give."* *"Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have,"* Hebrews taught us. Don't let your pride keep you from living for others. God is able to replenish your supply. When you give from God's bounty, you will never lack all that you need. When you love with God's love, He will fill you up. Don't be ashamed to be ridiculed and reproached for Jesus' sake.

Don't turn your head from the poor, the crippled, the lame or blind. These are your brothers and sisters in the most powerful sense, for these are the ones for whom Jesus died, just as for you. Taught by the Spirit serve your neighbor near and far, first with your prayers and compassion, with Your gifts to support Christian missions and ministry, locally through our Rescue Mission and worldwide through our partnerships in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. Serve in a humility born of your true identity as God's baptized sons and daughters. Jesus has given you a place at His table here at His Supper and through faith at His heavenly Table. May God lead us to extend that invitation in words and action to all His redeemed. Amen.

And now may the peace of God which surpasses human understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.